

**Series:** Receiving life by believing in God's Son (a Gospel of John study)

**Sermon Text:** John 18:28

**Key Words:** Religious Leaders

(\*This account is also found in Matthew 26:57-58; Mark 14:53-54; Luke 22:54-65)

Our series title for 18:1-19:15 is, "*No matter how things appear, Jesus is still King!*" It's about the value of believing this when friends fail us (18:1-12), when religious leaders fail us (18:13-27); and when political leaders fail us (18:28-19:15). Each week, we're also considering something vital Jesus said about following Him in John 16:33, "*I've said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*" Last week, we learned about terrible religious leaders in Israel who colluded with the government and trusted in human schemes rather than God's promises. Today, we'll take one more look at this same...

**BIG IDEA: Jesus is still King when religious leaders fail us.**

Israel was under the rule of Rome, who's emperor appointed governors to maintain control of the empire. The governor lived in [Caesarea](#), a town dedicated to [Caesar](#) by [Herod](#), yet during [Passover](#) he monitored the huge festival crowds from the palace [Herod](#) had built next to the temple in Jerusalem. *Verse 28* tells us *they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They didn't enter the governor's headquarters, so they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover.* As we've studied this gospel, we've come to realize John liked to unveil the meaning behind what was going on. Here, he highlighted [the irony](#) of the situation. Did you catch it? Their traditions forbade them from entering a [Gentile's home](#). They really wanted to participate in the week-long Passover celebrations, but THIS would've made them [ceremonially unclean](#). Never mind how they'd been mistreating an innocent man and violating like 18 of their own laws! As they abused a human being, who by the way was God in a human body, how could they believe rituals kept them pure in God's sight? Jesus tried showing them how they'd missed the point of His Father's laws and how God has always cared about matters of the heart (cf. Matthew 5-7), but their fixation on external behaviors left the world thinking otherwise and feeling hopeless (cf. [Matthew 23](#)). Little has changed, right? I mean, it's good we're finally talking about mental health, but the world still shames/cancels those who fail to think, feel, and act how we think they should. It's no wonder people think it's better to suffer in silence than to ask for help. Friends, the church has a better message for the world, do we not? Our gospel says that by sending His Son to live and die in our place--to do what laws could not do (cf. Romans 8:3-4), God offers redemptive ways to process sin and pain that bring life and hope.

That's what I want to speak about today. Our church has endured huge challenges lately, especially this week, and some of us wrestle with anger, doubt, questions, and how senseless it all seems. In my study this week, it occurred to me **John 18:28** is a perfect verse for this moment. As I pondered it in context, I found 2 crucial observations that offer us help and perspective...

**Observation #1: Rituals can often cover up what's wrong.** In John's story, corrupt men practiced empty rituals that weren't changing their hearts. While Scripture urges us to develop good habits, it's easy to "get into ruts" and "go through the motions" without engaging our heart, right? In Matthew 15, Jesus said worship is "vain" if it "offers lip service to God with no heart behind it." Our spiritual disciplines--like study, prayer, and doing life with others--must become more than a checklist. "Did I skim my Bible reading plan while daydreaming about my to-do list? Check!" "Did I offer a 3 second prayer for my friend? Check!" "Did God and at least one other Christian get a few scraps of my time this week? Check!" That's not what Jesus meant by "loving God with your whole being and neighbor as self." In his book, "Until Unity", Francis Chan urges us to realize God has called us to a love that goes beyond neutrality or "not hating" or even just being cordial. Godly love is an active, pour-ourselves-out kind of love.

Rituals leave us thinking we've done all God requires when we've barely begun! Furthermore, a ritual has no power to fix sin's devastating impacts. So, we can't presume people are okay because they participate with us in activities like Sunday worship, baptism, taking communion, or community group. In fact, as we say almost weekly, our spiritual habits recognize we're broken, and that Jesus was broken to heal us! Most of us realize we're not okay and are seeking help we can't find outside of the church. Before the Apostle Paul met Jesus, he believed credentials and routines were all that mattered. In Philippians 3 (NLT) he came to realize, "*all of this is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I've discarded everything else, counting it as garbage, so I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith.*" This takes us to...

**Observation #2: Jesus came to help us stop pretending and performing.** Now, I don't mean that spiritual habits and routines have no value or that we're to ignore stuff God says to do. It's just that, if we don't stay connected with Jesus, like the vine and branches metaphor in John 15, then what we do has no power. And if we're all equally this dependent upon Jesus, then what sense does it make to act

like we have it all together or try to keep up appearances? Sure, it's scary and risky to reveal what's really going on inside (e.g., our doubts, fears, sins), but Christ's death satisfied the wrath of the only one with the right to judge us. In fact, Jesus has taken our guilt, shame, and condemnation and given us redemptive tools like love, mercy, grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation. To pretend to have it all together or perform for one another on Sundays simply denies the gospel we claim to believe.

While discussing the message this week, Pastor Gary and Pastor Russ asked me to share that they also aren't okay right now. I've also not been okay this week, nor for a while now. My job involves being with people in their worst moments. I've cut back on news consumption and social media that generally leaves me feeling sad, angry, and hopeless. To me, the internet is like a modern-day Tower of Babel--bringing people together in the worst ways. We're not designed to bear the weight of all the world's evil and brokenness. I was listening to a [podcast](#) this week, where Dr. Brook Keels spoke of the rise of suicide in recent years and how it's become the #2 leading cause of death for ages 10-34. Did you know that? She also suggested the internet bonds us with people on the fringes in unhealthy ways. It can make us believe, "*I can't go on unless the whole world is for me*", which is really a lie. Her research has led her to believe we're more resilient when we have smaller communities of care, like the church, where we're fully known and fully loved. I agree.

**Let's pray:** Father, I believe this is what you envision for the church of Jesus Christ and think you have been preparing us for what that means. You're using our feelings of being overwhelmed to help us see our limited place in this world. You're teaching us to press into real relationships where we can make and receive the biggest impact. You're showing us that while we may not be able to trust people, we can always trust the gospel, so we never need to hide our thoughts and feelings. While it's scary, I'm thankful our church is becoming known for receiving society's outcasts and rejects--those the self-righteous folks don't want in their churches. Not that we take sin lightly, but we welcome all types of people who sin and love them to the end like Jesus loves us. While this disgusts those who don't know Jesus as well as they think, it makes us attractive to those Jesus is drawing to himself. So, particularly this week, may those who feel there's nowhere else to go in this world see us as a people who are approachable and worth the risk. We want to help them find redemption and hope. Amen.

**Let's sing:** "I want to know you"

So, what's your NEXT STEP?

- Remember, our next step always begins with faith in Christ. Either placing faith in Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent, change, and grow. Either way, His Spirit will help you.

**Quotes related to this passage:**

- **Religious corruption:** Professor Gary Burge wrote, “*This is a story of religious corruption, of spiritual leaders who slaughter the sheep and ruin the flock (cf. Ezek. 34). This is the story of priests who have bent the knee before Rome, not the temple; who have viewed God’s people as a power base, a social construct, a force among other political forces, an agent of change in the politics of change, and themselves as worthy brokers with the pagan power-broker from the Roman Senate. In the end, they are in the world as much as Pilate is; yet, disturbingly, they do not show any of Pilate’s reserve or regret. Being trained experts at ethics they know how ethics can be bent; being theologians adept at religious language, they know how to manipulate it for public consumption. Caiaphas and Annas represent men whose devotion to their religious careers and the political status quo exceeded their willingness to see God at work in Jesus. They have become the dangerous shepherds of chapter 10, whose interest in the welfare of the flock has been superseded by their own self-preservation.*” So, they were so devoted to survival that they could not recognize their true Savior and instead of feeding God’s flock, they were feeding His sheep to the wolves as political pawns. However, John told the story in a way that proves when God’s appointed leaders go astray, and let’s pray they don’t, the good shepherd always takes care of His sheep and God’s purposes always prevail. He is the true high priest who stands when all others fail us!
- **Light in darkness:** “So as Jesus stands before the flawed high priest of his nation, he vindicates in a wonderful way his title as the true High Priest of the people of God. He is one who is not ‘unable to sympathise with our weaknesses’ because ‘he himself is subject to weakness’; ‘tempted in every way, just as we are’, and so ‘is able’... ‘to help us in our time of need’ (see Heb. 4:15–16; 5:2; 2:18). The supreme star shining on in the darkness of that night is Jesus himself. He stands within the darkness and takes its terror into his own heart, but he remains standing; it does not engulf him. The darkness may encompass us, dreams remain unfulfilled, sorrow or tragedy strike, prayers fall back unanswered, weaknesses linger, but the light of God’s truth still shines in the darkness, until the day breaks and the shadows for evermore will flee away.” Pastor Bruce Milne
- **Perspective:** It’s fascinating how John told this tragic story while subliminally inserting the word “*king*” 12 times as a subtle reminder that King Jesus always prevails! The only question is, “*Will we fall for the latest human lie or trust the ancient story of God?*” God’s Word begs us to trust in the Lord with all our heart and to not lean unto our own understanding. It begs us to acknowledge Him in all our ways and look for Him in every circumstance believing He will be there to direct our paths. To do this, we must adopt a willingness to appear weak to a world that prides itself in being strong and using power to cancel undesirable people. As we ponder the story John has laid out, we must believe God is “*no stranger to darkness*” (Milne), that nothing can separate us from His love because nothing could separate Jesus from it (cf. Romans 8:28-39), and that His plans cannot be stopped—not even by corrupt religious leaders colluding with a world superpower. May we learn to trust God like Jesus did. When darkness seems too thick and evil swirls all around, may we learn to be still and know He is God—to stand and keep showing up, when logic gives us no reason to do so. Amen.

#### Quotes related to the larger context:

- **Full life:** John said he wrote this letter to help us find “*fullness of life through believing Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*” Chapters 1-12 contain 3 years of real-life stories where people

met Jesus during His public ministry. Chapters 13-21 slow way down as Jesus began to reveal His (God's) heart to His disciples in the week leading up to the cross and resurrection.

- **Book Context:** The Gospel of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, provides a clearly stated purpose. *John 20:30-31* says, “*Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*” Some people demand to have all their questions satisfied before bowing to Jesus, yet John claimed his limited account was enough to bring anyone to faith. As we read it, our Savior and friend emerges from the pages as a real person in the real world. Jesus shows us what we could become, if we too would rely on His infinite Father who will gladly supply whatever we need.
- **Life in his name:** Life is the Greek word, “zōē”, which means “Life, Living, Lifetime, Life-Giving” and is where we get the word, “zoology” in English. Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says it’s “used in the NT of life as a principle, life in the absolute sense, life as God has it, that which the Father has in Himself, and which He gave to the Incarnate Son to have in Himself, Jhn 5:26, and which the Son manifested in the world, 1Jo 1:2. From this life man has become alienated in consequence of the Fall, Eph 4:18, and of this life men become partakers through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Jhn 3:15, who becomes its Author to all such as trust in Him, Act 3:15, and who is therefore said to be ‘the life’ of the believer, Col 3:4, for the life that He gives He maintains, Jhn 6:35, 63. Eternal life is the present actual possession of the believer because of his relationship with Christ, Jhn 5:24; 1Jo 3:14, and that it will one day extend its domain to the sphere of the body is assured by the Resurrection of Christ, 2Cr 5:4; 2Ti 1:10. This life is not merely a principle of power and mobility, however, for it has moral associations which are inseparable from it, as of holiness and righteousness. Death and sin, life and holiness, are frequently contrasted in the Scriptures.”

**Other Articles/Songs/Videos:** Please ask us about many other resources.

- “[Songs of Suffering](#)” testimony by Joni Eareckson Tada
- “[A Grief Observed](#)” book by C.S. Lewis
- “[Are You Really Okay?](#)” book by Debra Fileta

### **Direction for discussion leaders:**

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the discussion around 30mins. Go for a single, not a home run.
3. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

### **Let’s prepare for our sermon from John 18:28.**

- As you read this verse, consider the irony of what they were doing while attempting to remain ceremonial pure. Think of ways this goes on today and maybe in your own life.

### **Let’s apply our sermon from John 18:28.**

- In Matthew 23, what problems did Jesus have with the way religious leaders in Israel applied the Law of Moses? What does Romans 8:1-8 reveal about why the gospel is more effective and what does this teach us about helping people?
- Are routines and spiritual habits a bad thing? How can it be easy to pretend and perform while going through the motions? Is anything bothering you that you haven't shared with your circle of support? Believe the gospel and let God's people help you find freedom in Christ!

**Here are some great resources for digging deeper into community group life...**

How life together looks <http://austinstone.org/stories/film/item/140-missional-community-lukes-story>

Rethinking what we do [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player\\_embedded](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded)

Numerous articles to provoke thought <http://toddengstrom.com/archives/>

What groups of 2-3 might look like <http://toddengstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/LTG-Overview.pdf>